

# The Surprising New Chapter in the Strange Case of the "Outlaw of Cameron Dam"

**How a Self-Sacrificing and Honest Impostor Collected a Million Names for the Pardon of the Famous John Dietz, Saving Him from Life Imprisonment---and How Psychology Explains His Delusion and Labors**



Helen Dietz, Eleven-Year-Old Daughter of the Outlaw, Parleying with the Sheriff Under a Flag of Truce Just Before Her Father Surrendered

JOHN F. DIETZ, lumber-jack, home-steader and woodsman, of Winter, Wis., became famous some ten years ago because of the remarkable fight he waged against powerful lumber interests, who, he claimed, were oppressing him. Dietz is a curious survival of the old-time pioneer.

The trouble first arose in 1904, when Dietz's wife acquired a tract of land at Winter, on the Thornapple River. Resting on this land and crossing the river was Cameron Dam, which had long been used by the lumbermen to raise the water of the river to a sufficient height to enable them to float their logs from the forests to the mills below.

Dietz believed that he was entitled to compensation for the use of the river flowing by his land and notified the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company, whose men were about to float millions of feet of pine logs down the river that they could not do so unless they paid him for the privilege.

The company appealed to the courts. They obtained an injunction. Dietz evaded service.

Successive attempts were made to serve Dietz, but he defeated them all. Dietz became known throughout the country as the "Outlaw of Cameron Dam."

After three or four years of deadly warfare the lumber interests capitulated. The trouble would probably have ended there, but in 1910 Dietz got into an altercation with a man at a primary election and in the scuffle which ensued a peacemaker named Horel was shot and slightly wounded.

A warrant charging him with assault with intent to kill was issued and Sheriff Mike Madden prepared to serve it.

A terrific battle ensued. Over a thousand shots were fired. One of the deputies was killed and Dietz and his son Leslie were wounded. Realizing at length that his fight was a hopeless one and fearing to risk the lives of his family by further hostilities, Dietz decided to surrender. Handing a sheet to Helen, his eleven-year-old daughter, he sent her out

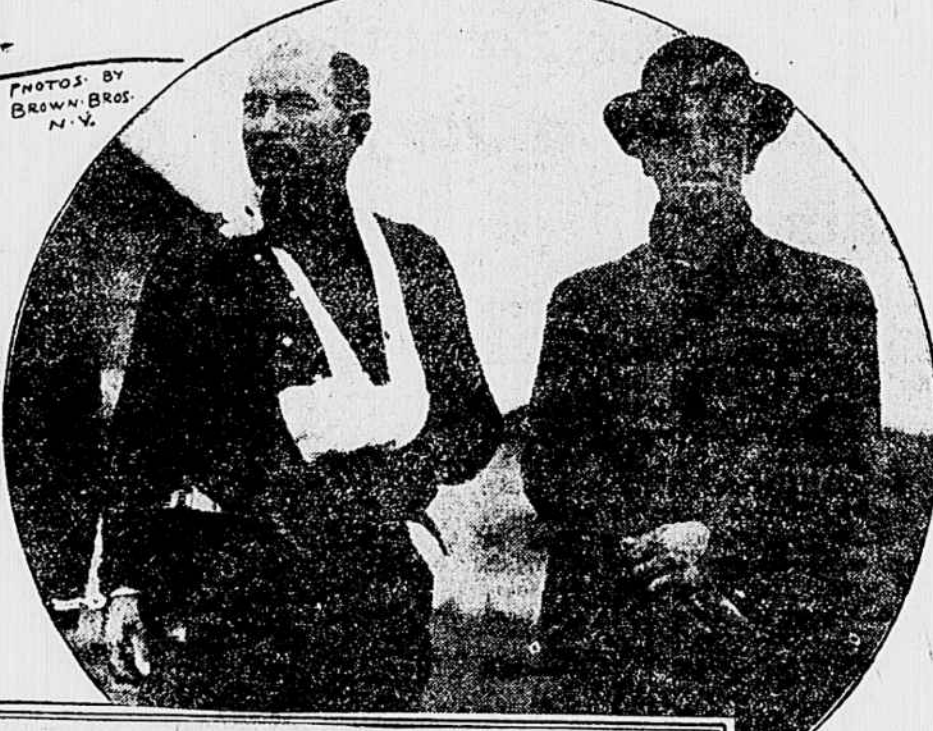
to the Sheriff to announce his willingness to surrender.

Dietz, Mrs. Dietz, and Leslie were arrested, indicted and tried for the murder of the Deputy, but only Dietz was found guilty. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, the death penalty not prevailing in Wisconsin.

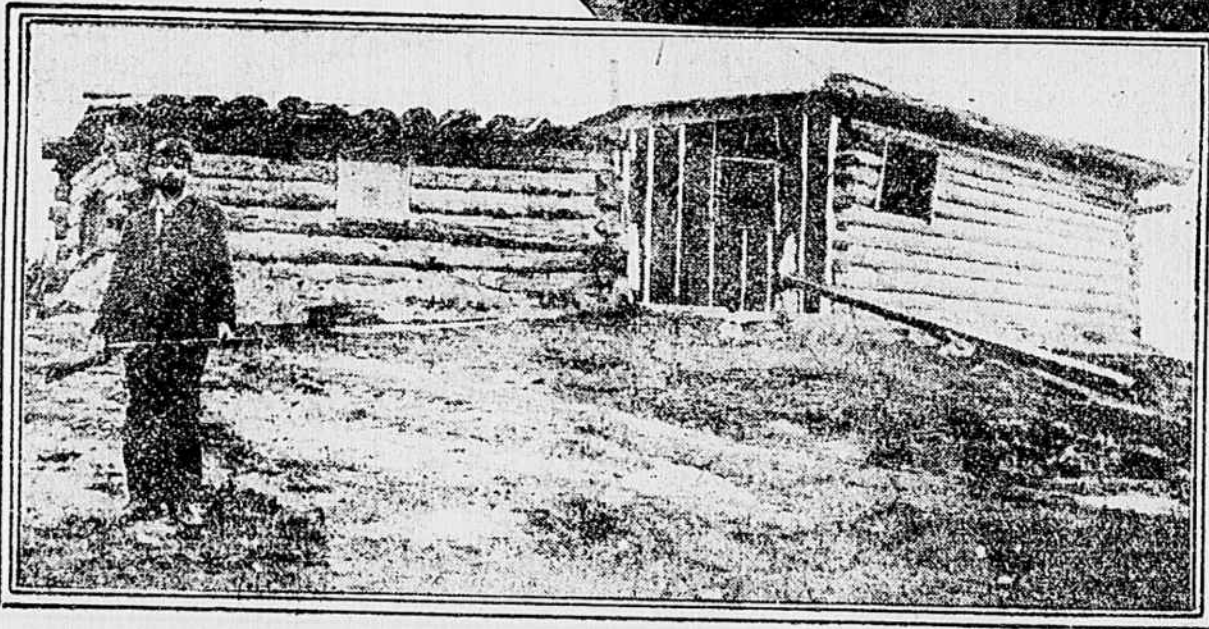
Last December, Governor McGovern commuted Dietz's term to life imprisonment. Under the parole law, Dietz may now be released in four years. The Governor's action was largely influenced by the receipt of petitions signed by hundreds of thousands of names which came from every State in the Union.

The strange origin of these petitions has just been revealed and is told here for the first time.

PHOTOS BY BROWN BROS. N.Y.



John F. Dietz, the Outlaw, and His Son, the Real Leslie Dietz, Photographed After Their Arrest in 1910, and Below the Cabin in Which They Defied the Authorities for Six Years.



## The Strange Story of the Petitions for the Outlaw's Pardon

A HALF-STARVED and rain-soaked man fell from exhaustion in Colonial Park, New York City, a few weeks ago and fractured his skull. He was taken unconscious to the Washington Heights Hospital.

The only clue to the man's identity at that time were two stiff-covered note-books found in the pockets of his tattered clothes. On the inside front cover of each of these books was pasted a slip of paper bearing the following typewritten words:

"A petition for the pardon of John F. Dietz, known as the outlaw of Cameron Dam, for defending his family and property."

LESLIE E. DIETZ.

"Cameron Dam, Wis."

Both books were filled with signatures, about eight to the page. There were some 2,000 of them in each of the books.

When the patient recovered consciousness he told the hospital authorities that he was Leslie Dietz, of Winter, Wis., son of the famous outlaw of Cameron Dam. For the past twenty-five months he had been engaged in securing signatures to a petition for the pardon of his father. From State to State he had tramped, enduring all sorts of privations and covering over 12,000 miles on foot in the course of his pilgrimage.

So intent was the pilgrim on his mission that for days he went without proper food, and starvation, combined with his exertions, often weakened him to such an extent that he dropped in his tracks. That was how he had come to fall in Colonial Park.

The story the patient told was so pathetic and so convincing that most of the newspapers throughout the country printed a sympathetic account of the accident which had befallen the pilgrim from Wisconsin, whose filial labors, it

was found, had already resulted in the commutation of the outlaw's sentence from life imprisonment to twenty years, and who was continuing his arduous task in the hope of securing his father's immediate release.

These stories were read with interest in Wisconsin, where the adventures of the Dietz family were part of the history of the State, and word was at once sent to New York that Leslie Dietz, son of the outlaw, is now engaged in running a grocery store at Mayville, Wis.; that he had never made any attempt to secure the pardon of his father by petition; that, in fact, he had never been further east than Michigan in his life, and that the man in the Washington Heights Hospital claiming to be Leslie Dietz must therefore be either a deliberate impostor or suffering from a mental delusion.

When this startling information was received the "Leslie Dietz" at the hospital was further interrogated, and here is the story he told:

"So they say I am an impostor—that I am not Leslie Dietz, son of John F. Dietz, the outlaw, of Cameron Dam, at all!"

"If I am an impostor, I am certainly the most unusual impostor ever dis-

covered, for no one has ever suggested how I could possibly benefit by representing myself as the son of a convicted murderer and working for his pardon as I have done these past twenty-five months."

"During those twenty-five months I have had some pretty rough experiences. I have gone without food for days. I have slept in the snow when the temperature was 10 degrees below zero. I have worn out twenty-two pairs of shoes, and for days at a time have walked barefoot until I could earn enough by odd jobs to buy shoe leather."

"In some cities that I have gone through I have been arrested as a tramp and a vagrant but, for the most part, my mission has secured me against such misfortunes. When I started on my errand I weighed 170 pounds. To-day I weigh only 135."

"I have been through nearly every State in the Union."

"I was born in Green Bay, Wis., forty-nine years ago. I was about four years old when my father built his log cabin at Cameron Dam on 160 acres which he had acquired in the regular way."

"My father is now seventy-six years old. I have had only one brother and one sister. My brother is Clarence Dietz, now

twenty-six years old, and my sister is Maria, now twenty-two."

"I married Kate Finnegan and had two children, Johnny and Mary, sometimes called Mabel. The youngsters were killed in a fight with the sheriff's posse in 1908. My wife died in Winter, in 1909."

"Our trouble with the lumber interests grew out of their efforts to confiscate our dam. When they found that my father would not submit they did everything they could to force us out."

"Father, mother and I were all tried together after we had been in jail about 110 days. Only father was convicted. He is now a Federal prisoner at Waupun, Wis., because the man he shot during the raid on our cabin in 1910 was standing on the Federal Indian Reservation at the time."

"I have already sent 15 petitions from each of the various States I have visited to President Wilson. I addressed them to Carl Schultz, a Washington lawyer. Of course, they reached the President, because they bore results."

"The startling discrepancies between this story and the facts as ascertained from various reliable sources may now be referred to."

In the first place, the warden of Waupun prison declares that Dietz is not and never has been a Federal prisoner. Hence, President Wilson has no power to pardon him.

Secondly, John F. Dietz, the outlaw, is not more than fifty years old; whereas, the New York "Leslie Dietz" says he is seventy-six.

Thirdly, the outlaw had six children; namely, Leslie, Clarence, Myra, Helen, John and a baby.

Fourthly, the real Leslie Dietz is only twenty-four years old to-day, whereas the man in New York says he is forty-nine.

Fifthly, the real Leslie Dietz was unquestionably in Mayville, Wis., when his namesake was lying unconscious in a New York hospital.

Sixthly, when shown a photograph of the Dietz family, a day or two after he had told the foregoing story, the New York Leslie Dietz said that a child of twelve or thereabouts who, in fact, is Helen Dietz, daughter of the outlaw, was Clara Dietz, his own daughter, although a day or two before he had said his own daughter was named Mary or Mabel.

Seventhly, investigation in Washington failed to reveal any Carl Schultz, a lawyer. When interrogated further as to this, the New York Leslie Dietz explained that Schultz, whom he now referred to as John Schultz, was in reality a Wisconsin lawyer, having an office in Madison or Wisconsin, but that he was frequently in Washington. When reminded that previously he had said the lawyer's name was Carl, whereas now he gave it as John, he explained that the man's name was really John Carl Schultz.

A dozen more serious discrepancies of this character pointed conclusively to the fact that this man whose efforts have already resulted in the commutation of the famous outlaw's sentence, and whose continued work may bring about the man's earlier release, is not Leslie Dietz at all.

The fact that he actually believes himself Leslie Dietz and that under that personality he secured a commutation of sentence for the man he may never have seen presents one of the most striking phenomena ever brought to the attention of psychologists. How they explain it is told here.

A Petition for the Pardon of John E. Dietz.  
Known as the Outlaw of Cameron Dam,  
for defending his family and property.  
Wit. \_\_\_\_\_  
Sig. \_\_\_\_\_  
Leslie E. Dietz  
Cameron Dam, Wis.

"Leslie Dietz" Who Believes He Is the Son of the Famous Outlaw and Whose Strange Story Is Told Here, and a Photograph of One of His Petitions.

## How Psychology Explains the Strange Delusion of "Leslie Dietz"

By Dr. A. K. Vandegrift, the Distinguished Psychologist.

THE case of the man calling himself Leslie Dietz belongs to a well-known group of psychological phenomena, and is also one of the rarest forms of its own group. There can be no question that this man, whoever he is, thinks himself Leslie Dietz and actually thinks as he would if he really were Leslie Dietz. In other words, he has no conscious memories of any past except that which he has invented on the line of the Dietz hallucination. He is in a dream. But with this difference—that he is a conscious moving agent who, while keeping the illusionary framework of his dream intact, directs it according to his own will.

For the explanation of this strange case let us go back to one of the earliest manifestations of the same complex in childhood. Many children gifted with imagination invite punishment for lying when they are not consciously lying at all. A child will invent some wonderful invention and he will then tell his parents that he has actually gone through this adventure. He will hear of something which inflames his childish imagination and he will promptly claim to have seen or to have been a part of this same happening. The child really believes what he says. His visualization is so perfect that he actually confuses reality with the unreal.

Another manifestation is the very extraordinary one that all psychologists and criminologists know. This is the

self-accusation of perfectly innocent people whenever any crime whose elements are adapted to impress the imagination of these particular people occurs. Every magistrate knows that following any particularly atrocious murder men and women will write letters accusing themselves of the crime. In many cases men, and women, too, have actually appeared before the police and given themselves up as the slayers. These people go into voluminous detail as to just how and why they did the murder. They actually believe that they are the criminals. Even when confronted with the absolute facts that they could not possibly have been at the scene of the murder at the time it was done, they still persist in their self-accusations and immediately invent plausible explanations.

It has been noted that always in such cases the subject is hazy as to the real circumstances of his life.

These people are not liars; they actually believe in what they say.

This man Leslie Dietz was a lumber-jack. He may have come from the same locality as the real Dietz. He may not. But all his experiences in life, without doubt, ran along the actual everyday life experiences of Dietz. He had lived in the same kind of surroundings, he had fought the same kind of fights, and, no doubt, he had seen and sympathized with the struggles of the later day pioneers against the great lumber interests.

When he either heard, or was told, of Dietz's fight and imprisonment, it aroused in his mind all his own sleeping grievances. He may have started in by saying to himself: "What would I have done if I had been in Dietz's place?" or he may have said: "What would I have done if I were Leslie Dietz?" In minds of this character, the step from thinking in Leslie Dietz's place to actually believing himself in Leslie Dietz's place, is a small one. Suddenly he found himself saying, perhaps with surprise at first: "Why, I AM Leslie Dietz." The obsession was now complete.

The actual facts of his past would begin to fade from his life. Every day he would feel himself more and more to be Leslie Dietz, and his mind would busy itself building up all kinds of details to support its own illusion. As this new structure of personality arose his older one diminished in exact proportion.

This man, whoever he is, became to all intents and purposes the son of the outlaw of Cameron Dam, wandering about the country, suffering hunger, thirst and other privations in a pilgrimage to save his father. And so intense was his belief in himself that he has impressed it upon everyone he has met, and has actually through his hallucinations done the thing that the outlaw's own son could not do—have his father's sentence commuted from life imprisonment to a short term of years.

Undoubtedly here we have one of the strangest phenomena of the human mind. It parallels in its workings out the gigantic efforts of the "inspired" delusionists who have assumed other personalities and changed the destinies of the world scores of times.